ASSESSING ETHICAL COMPETENCE: THE CASE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

The role of Human Resources Management (HRM) can be characterised as "provid[ing] direction as to how an organisation should handle people so that organisation[al] effectiveness and individual satisfaction are maximised" (Trezise, 1996:87). Such a role inevitably creates a number of ethical tensions. If HRM practitioners face difficult ethical challenges in organisations, then it follows that it is important to understand what type of ethical expertise they require to address these challenges. My first aim will be to assess whether prevailing models of ethical expertise are able to conceptualise moral agency and the capacity that is needed to develop such agency in HRM. In this regard, I shall argue that the prevailing models are insufficient for their purposes. My second aim will be to develop a more satisfactory account. I will argue that a broader notion of ethical expertise is required: one, which includes not only virtue but also the process of deliberation and the application of moral agency; which is effectively able to deal with a multitude of situations; and which has a chance of identifying the best alternatives in complex HRM ethical situations. Such an expanded notion of ethical expertise potentially strengthens the ability of HRM practitioners to be more effective as ethical stewards.

Keywords: HRM, Virtue, Moral Competency, HRM ethical framework, HRM development

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts, Applied Ethics for Professionals, in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Yendor Reginald Felgate, 15th day of March 2018

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Contents

Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) is a rapidly developing set of "practices, policies, procedures and programmes" that have to do with managing people in organisations (Ulrich et al., 2008:7). HRM is responding to increasing business demands, whilst attempting to establish itself as a profession analogous to the way medicine or law has done. However, unlike medicine or law, the HRM profession deals with complex organisational issues that create potential conflicts and challenges regarding the use of people.

HRM practices have developed more rapidly than the development of its theoretical foundations (Wright and McMahan, 1992; Marciano, 1995; Wright and Boswell, 2002; and Greenwood, 2002), leaving gaps in the account of HRM and, with it, ethical role ambiguity and multiplicity. The view that HRM is an inherently conflicted endeavour is in part due to the absence of a coherent account of ethical HRM, and such conflict is traceable back to its roots in personnel management and the management of employee relations (Winstanley, Woodall and Heery, 1996). The possibility of managing 'human resources' ethically remains unresolved and perhaps underdetermined.

The aim of this research report is to contribute to the theorisation of HRM by proposing the ethical concept of 'virtue' as a form of moral skill specific to HRM. A virtue is a character trait that involves a "well-entrenched multi-dimensional mind-set" (Hursthouse, 2013:3). A virtue-ethical approach is proposed as a viable alternative to deontological and consequentialist approaches because of the discretion required by HRM practitioners in complex ethical situations not easily captured in rules or measured by consequences. HRM practitioners require the capacity to make ethical judgements and

an assessment is thus made in this report of moral competence as an ethical approach for HRM practitioners.

Chapter 1 compares mainstream and alternative approaches to ethical HRM. Both approaches seem to rest on the notion that the role of HRM is to—insofar as possible—reconcile employee and organisational interests that may never be fully reconcilable. An emerging perspective suggests that HRM can be ethical by managing ethical convergence. Ethical convergence is initially defined as the balancing of what is good for people and what is good for the organisation. One way of doing so is to apply a virtue-ethical approach to HRM.

Chapter 2 introduces a virtue-theoretic approach to HRM that shows how HRM practitioners develop the capacity to respond intelligently to situations by making moral judgements that are good for people and organisations. The intelligent development of virtue is seen as analogous to developing a skill and is important because one of the primary concerns with the standard HRM account is that a code of ethics is not sufficient for ethical HRM. Moral competency then is the capacity to make a skilled moral judgement in context (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015). An objection to virtue as being too demanding is addressed by showing that a range of responses to the ethical demands of HRM is possible.

Chapter 3 argues that the virtuous HRM practitioner knows how to achieve ethical convergence by exhibiting the capacity of moral judgement. A cardinal-virtue approach is used to describe HRM moral capacity as the moral competencies of prudence, justice, self-control and courage. A description of how HRM practitioners exhibit moral judgement, by using a combination of moral competencies, during decision-making is provided.

Chapter 4 argues that HRM practitioners aspire to be practical experts as a response to the demands of HRM. The idea that expertise and work is progressively linked is further developed by proposing an ethical HRM framework, which uses the stages of the H. and S. Dreyfus model of skills acquisition as a basis. The exact combination of moral competence used per level is dependent on circumstance, but what can be described is how the level of work demand changes from novice through to expert. The HRM practitioner can use the framework and attendant descriptions to engage with the demands of HRM and begin to understand the forms of technical and moral expertise required to do so.

Finally, Chapter 5 proposes that HRM moral competencies can be developed through a process of a particular type of continuous professional development. Current approaches are argued to be too reliant on abstract knowledge, rather than developing the practical expertise required of HRM practitioners. Practical expertise can be learnt by using different forms of reflection to critically examine the application of HRM practical expertise, attendant to the demands of ethical HRM. In order to address the need to develop a practical skills education programme, a skill based HRM curriculum is proposed.

Chapter 1: Ethics of HRM

Human Resources Management (HRM) has gained significant popularity with HR professional associations, business schools, organisations, HRM practitioners and academics since its emergence in the 1980s (Marciano, 1995; Simmons, 2008; and Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim, 2011). The rapid development of "practices, policies, procedures and programmes" in HRM is embodied in the work of HR professional associations, such the South African Board of People Practice (SABPP) and is seen as a response to increasing business demands (Ulrich et al., 2008) and professionalisation (Van Rensburg et al., 2011).

One of the reasons for the popularity of HRM is the view that as business increasingly transitions from the industrial to information age, the real foundation of competitive advantage lies in the successful management of talented employees in organisations (Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren and Visser, 2003). Part of the successful management of employees is treating them in an ethical manner, which is thought to lead to improved employee engagement (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006) and better organisational outcomes (Chun, 2005).

This chapter describes the mainstream or functional view of HRM (Greenwood, 2002) and some of its limitations. Critical questions are raised regarding inherent tensions within organisations, and the issue of HRM role conflict (or duality) is explored. The argument put forward is that neither the mainstream, nor the critical view currently provide a developed account of how to deal with the ethical demands of HRM. The mainstream view is over-reliant on rules and codes that cannot adequately account for ethical HRM complexity and HRM discretion, whilst the critical view does not propose an ethical alternative (Greenwood, 2002).

Instead, a view of ethical HRM is proposed that seeks to balance the interests of employees and the organisation. The balancing of interests is a form of ethical convergence, which I will describe as respecting the 'human' in human resources. A gap exists in the current ethical research as to what convergence means, requiring some form of articulation or ethical theory (Greenwood, 2002; and Wright and Boswell, 2002). One approach that may help with articulating the meaning of convergence is the development of a practitioner-based virtue account that is able to respond to complex ethical demands, such as the balancing of interests in the case of HRM.

The argument put forward here is that ethical HRM is a possibility if HRM practitioners have the normative skills required to address complex ethical demands and that one ethical theory that can help is a virtue account of HRM. A virtue account describes the development of normative responses to complex ethical issues and provides some answers regarding ethical convergence, ways to approach ethical HRM, and—importantly—what is required to be ethical. In this way, the account extends the functional view of HRM beyond its current articulation, whilst addressing some of the concerns of the HRM sceptics.

1.1. Mainstream HRM

The mainstream view of HRM is that its purpose is to "provide direction as to how an organisation should handle [manage] people so that organisation[al] effectiveness and individual satisfaction are maximised" (Trezise, 1996:87), or what is referred to as the legitimate use of employees in organisations (Greenwood, 2002). HRM claims professional status as a body of specialist or formal practices that deals with people as sources of value in organisations (Greenwood and Freeman, 2011;

and Abbott, 2015).[1] Professional practice covers all aspects of the employee life cycle or experience within organisations, including but not limited to attraction, selection, retention, performance, development and utilisation of human resources (Ulrich et al., 2008).

One of the most developed mainstream formulations of HRM is the example of the South African Board for People Practices (SABPP) (2014:1-115) HRM standards model. The model treats HRM as a system of professional, specialist or formal practices that encompasses the employee life cycle in the form of HRM policies. On this view, HRM aligns to the business through HRM strategy, talent and risk management. Functional HR practices such as workforce planning, learning and development, performance management, reward, wellness, employee relations and organisational development form the HR architecture that supports HRM strategy. Implementation is through HR service delivery and the use of HR technology, with ongoing measurement forming part of continuous improvement. Specialist staff or HRM practitioners acting in a competent, professional manner (that can be measured against a high standard) (Abbott, 2015:5) are responsible for the ethical management of human resources systems in organisations (Marciano, 1995; and Abbott, 2015).[2]

1 HRM in South Africa is considered a profession because of the commitment to mastering a complex body of knowledge, demonstrating integrity, having autonomy in practice and accepting a duty to society; albeit a profession that is still developing and where membership remains voluntary (Van Rensburg, Basson and Carrim, 2011).

2 Whilst HRM practices have clear duties and obligations, these can vary considerably from business to business in terms of their interpretation and application, with HRM practitioners typically having a large amount of discretion regarding the design and implementation of such practices; or what is referred to as 'HRM role multiplicity' (Wooten, 2001).

The importance of HRM functionality derives from prevailing management theory, where it is important to put in place systems and policies that are predictive, consistent and casual in nature, to manage people in order to achieve organisational goals (Greenwood, 2002:271). It is the development of HRM practices that is at the centre of increasing HRM's status (Ulrich et al., 2008; and Carey 1999) and the perception of HRM as being strategically valuable to organisations in particular.

The emerging literature on ethics and HRM makes (and is required to make) significant assumptions regarding the purpose of the organisation, the roles and responsibilities of managers, and the rights and obligations of employees (Greenwood, 2002:272). One of the most contentious assumptions in the mainstream view is the notion that people in organisations and broader stakeholders have a mutual and therefore a unitary interest in the success of an organisation (Van Oosterhout et al., 2004).

Questions about the adequacy of the mainstream conception of HRM and its assumptions regarding unitary goals and mutuality have been raised, with the HRM sceptics remaining pessimistic about the possibility of ethical HRM (Legge, 1996; Winstanley, Woodall and Heery, 1996; Trezise, 1996; Winstanley and Woodall, 2000; Simmons, 2008; Jack, Greenwood and Schapper, 2012; de Gama, McKenna, and Peticca-Harris, 2012; and Csillag, 2014).

1.2. Objections to Mainstream HRM

A critical perspective on mainstream HRM exists. The critical perspective suggests that organisations are not mutually unified entities as envisaged in the mainstream HRM view but are rather political and social sites of genuine plurality of interests and tension (Winstanley et al., 1996; Winstanley and

Woodall, 2000; Van Oosterhout et al., 2004; Greenwood, 2002; and Greenwood and Freeman, 2011). There is a perception of an imbalance of power that tends to favour business interests over employee concerns.

In line with the imbalance of power, the view is that HRM practitioners favour the organisation in the design, interpretation and administration of policy (Winstanley et al., 1996; Winstanley and Woodall, 2000; Van Oosterhout et al., 2004; Greenwood, 2002 and Greenwood and Freeman, 2011). One example is when HRM practitioners measure and evaluate employees in order to calculate ways to make them more productive, controllable and predictable (Townley, 1993).

The question of the goal of HRM arises when comparing the mainstream with the critical view (Bailey et al., 1997). It seems from the critical perspective that the function of HRM is simply to help organisations achieve their goals in the most effective manner possible (perhaps taking into consideration minimum statutory requirements) and that such an approach is open to problems of exploitation or the misuse of people (Guest, 1999). In contrast, the mainstream view suggests that the goal of HRM is to create a form of mutuality based on an implied affirmative obligation to employees (Greenwood, 2002).

If organisations have an affirmative obligation to employees, then the question becomes: what form of HRM is ethical, keeping in mind the pertinent issues of power and the balance of interests? The issues of power and balance are legitimate concerns, raised by the HRM sceptics. Most HRM professional associations are supportive of the notion of affirmative obligation and in the case of the SABPP (2013:1), they strongly claim that the goal of HRM is to achieve organisational goals and provide 'meaningful work'.

My view is that the goal of HRM is to seek a balancing of interests—though given the tensions that exist in organisations, these may never be fully reconcilable (Simmons, 2008). The balancing-of-interests view is a more moderate claim than the one of unity and mutuality in the mainstream approach and creates complex ethical demands for HRM. For example: there are positive discrimination claims regarding affirmative action and talent management; calls for fairness in terms of equal pay for equal value of work and gender parity; and controversies regarding how to pay CEOs relative to shop-floor workers. The argument is that these complex ethical demands cannot be adequately addressed in functional policies and codes of practice only, which the mainstream view relies on. Moreover, we also cannot look to the critical perspective, as it simply does not provide an alternative ethical explanation (Greenwood, 2002).

If the goal of HRM is the affirmative balancing of interests, then we need to understand in more detail what this means. My view is that ethical HRM is possible if the balancing of interests means the focus of HRM policy is a positive one: one where there is a focus on the individual and their needs, enabling them to develop and fully contribute to organisations (Bailey et al., 1997). HRM practitioners then attempt to achieve convergence through the design, interpretation and application of good policies, which has been referred to by Greenwood (2002) as the intersection between the instrumental and the normative.

Another difficulty with the idea of ethical HRM is the problem of role duality (Boselie et al., 2009). According to sceptics, HRM is by nature conflicted (Carey, 1999). HRM practitioners inadvertently end up in the middle of competing interests in organisations and these interests expect what they consider to be appropriate consideration. The perception is that HRM defaults to favour management and

control, rather than truly understanding the impact of HRM processes on individuals or having the courage to challenge the possible 'misuse' of people or powerful interests appropriating more than their due (Winstanley et al., 1996; Winstanley and Woodall, 2000; and Van Oosterhout et al., 2004).

One example of this perceived default tendency is when HRM justifies the remuneration process that allows senior leaders to accumulate above-market compensation, on the back of increasing performance targets for employees. In such a clash, the question arises as to whether the primary duty of care is to the individual or the organisation (Carey, 1999), when genuine tensions exist (Cornelius and Gagnon, 1999, Greenwood and De Cieri, 2005; Greenwood and Freeman, 2011, Caldwell, Truong, Linh, and Tuan, 2011) or when such interests may never be fully reconcilable (Marciano, 1995; Van Oosterhout et al., 2004; Simmons, 2008; Greenwood and Freeman, 2011; and Rhodes and Harvey, 2012).

An approach to ethical HRM is required that is able to find a way that applies HRM practice ethically whilst mitigating the problem of role duality. The argument here is that any ethical approach in HRM should focus on the HRM practitioner.[3] The HRM practitioner is at the centre of the intent, design, application and evaluation of practice—the assumption being that ethical HRM is about seeking the good for employees and the organisation. In this view, the HRM practitioner focuses on basic human rights, social and organisational justice, the universal principle of not treating individuals as a mere

3 Greenwood (2002) suggests that practitioner-focused and rights-based approaches are part of an evolving discourse on ethical HRM. She goes onto to suggest that stakeholder management theory may be a further option based on the affirmative obligation of organisations to their stakeholders.

means to an end and seeing the organisation as a community of purpose (Winstanley, Woodall and Heery, 1996).

The suggestion here is to extend the notion of practitioner-focus to include the consideration of the expertise of the HRM practitioner in a more meaningful way. Even if the envisaged HRM policy is fair, it still has to be interpreted and administered in an ethical way, such as in the case of affirmative action, performance management or equal-pay-for-equal-value-of-work approaches (Abbot, 2015).

An example of how convergence and expertise manifest in HRM in terms of a practitioner focus is the contentious issue of performance management (Fletcher, 2001). Performance management is a planned process of directing, developing, supporting, aligning and improving individual and team performance in enabling the sustained achievement of organisational objectives (SABPP, 2014:67). Performance management in the critical view is seen as the ultimate form of coercive HRM because it is perceived to be what managers do to people, rather than with people, in terms of measurement and evaluation (Winstanley and Stuart-Smith, 1996).

Conversely, performance management can be ethical if implemented in a respectful, fair and transparent manner (Gibbons, 2015) through the valuing of employee inputs in the design and use of performance management (Winstanley and Stuart-Smith, 1996). A description of ethical HRM in this view suggests that HRM leads by developing and implementing bespoke organisational people-strategies and policies that protect [develop] employee interests, yet balance operational and human resource requirements in a way that does not compromise "respect for, and the dignity of the individual" (Carey, 1999:64); and provides the most explicit view of what it means to manage convergence in ethical HRM.

Even if such affirmation is captured (as in the example of performance management) and turned into HRM practices, ethical judgement is still required as it is not always easy to "know what is the right thing to do or not easy to do the right thing" (Abbott, 2015:6) when taking action. The difficulty of 'knowing what the right thing to do' is, is well captured in the research on HRM practitioners. Many HRM practitioners recognise that HRM has an ethical role to play in organisations, with the valuing of "sound moral character" and the "respect for human dignity" (Kirsten et al., 2015). Few, though, are clear on how to define ethics or go about being ethical (Erasmus and Wordsworth, 2006; and Van Vuuren and Eiselen, 2006).

One of the approaches that seeks to understand ethical judgements that can be applied to HRM is virtue theory, which is a good example of a practitioner focused ethical approach. If HRM practitioners have the capacity to make ethical judgements when determining right and wrong, and this is part of who they are (or a part of their professional character) then there is a fostering of right responses in terms of interests and the mitigation of the problems of duality. In the next section, I will make some preliminary comments on how virtue can be used to address complex ethical demands.

1.3. Virtue Approach

Many situations are ambiguous, especially in interpreting what is ethical. The SABPP acknowledges the HRM challenge in the following way:

> The formulation and interpretation of policies is not always straightforward and it is in these grey areas that an HR practitioner needs to be skilled at recognising an ethical issue, analysing it and finding an appropriate resolution, which is fair to all parties. Furthermore, policies often provide for discretionary powers to exercise by executives, line managers and HR practitioners. Some rules may not be totally clear, and sometimes roles and responsibilities overlap or leave gaps resulting in conflicts. Sometimes also, a judgement needs to be made where one of the possible outcomes is to the advantage or disadvantage of the HR practitioner who is providing advice or support to line management. There are, therefore, many situations in organisations where the ethical judgement of HR practitioners may be tested (Abbott, 2015:5).

There are limits to the dissemination of the 'good' in policies, rules and guidelines because they cannot adequately account for all decisions that require judgement and ethical expertise. This is especially the case in situations of ambiguity, where there is an examination of the behaviour of the HRM practitioner in terms of knowing what to do in an ethical sense and having the character and expertise to do so.

In circumstances where the HRM practitioner finds HRM practice—in and of itself—insufficient in determining ethical outcomes in potentially difficult circumstances, it is conceivable that they will have to rely largely on their moral judgement and expertise. Some form of moral expertise is a requirement for most HR professional associations (AHRD, 1999; SHRM, 2012; 2016 and SABPP, 2014), although it is not a prerequisite in many of the globally accepted HRM competency models (Lee and Yu, 2013). The SABPP define being ethically competent as behaving with integrity irrespective of where HR work is done (SABPP, 2013:1).

Over the last 30 years there has been a resurgence of interest in the concept of virtue, virtue related topics and virtue theory in applied ethics (Annas, 2015:1). A virtue approach enables HRM practitioners to capture the positive intention of contracting strategy and policy, whilst retaining the flexibility to make ethical judgements that care for people and is central to the ethical HRM project of 'knowing what to do' in the form of practical expertise, when faced with balancing interests in organisations. The next chapter describes virtue as a form of moral skill that HRM practitioners acquire and use to make ethical judgements that are central to ethical HRM. The virtue-as-skills approach allows for the combining of professional character and skills in the form of moral competencies. Moral competency in its simplest form is the capacity to make a skilled moral judgement in context (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015).

Chapter 2 The Character of HRM

HRM practitioners are not moral advisors in the abstract sense, but rather practitioners or practical experts with particular expertise,[4] who operate largely within a community or organisation; and as part of such a community, they need to be motivated and able to discern the form of normative action to take in terms of ethical HRM. When considering a virtue approach, important questions arise regarding the professional character of HRM in terms of the judgements and actions that contribute to the attainment of HRM convergence.

A virtue-theoretic approach to HRM looks at how HRM practitioners respond to situations by making moral judgements that are good for people and organisations. Furthermore, the desire to do good and strive for mastery may commit HRM practitioners to seek moral excellence beyond the procedural and functional strictures envisaged by HR practices. In so doing, it may open the way for a more developed form of ethical HRM and, indeed, a leadership role for HRM in organisational ethics.

I will begin with a short account of the concept 'virtue' before explaining the way that virtues can be understood to be analogous to skill. The account of virtue-as-skill is useful for my purposes since, as explained in the previous chapter, one of the primary concerns with the standard account is that a

4 When we refer to HRM practitioners as practical experts, we use the term to mean the ideal form of HRM practitioners striving for or developing moral expertise.

code of ethics is not sufficient for ethical HRM. HR practitioners need to be flexible and capable of making decisions that foster ethical convergence in demanding situations.

2.1. Virtue

Virtue ethics is one of the three major approaches in normative ethics. Virtue ethics is, as the name suggests, focused on the virtues. When referring to a virtue such as justice, courage, charity or benevolence, typically three concepts are applied. They are *arête* (excellence or virtue), *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom) and e*udaimonia* (usually translated as happiness or flourishing) (Hursthouse, 2013:2). A virtuous person, then, is one who acts virtuously, and a virtue is a character trait that a human needs to flourish (Hursthouse, 1991).

A virtue is a character trait that involves a "well-entrenched multi-dimensional mind-set that can include actions, emotions, choices, values, desires, perceptions, attitudes, interests, expectations and sensibilities" (Hursthouse, 2013:3). Such responses are said to be 'intelligent'. Intelligent responses are inherent and dynamic, being reliable and active in a reasoned moral sense (Annas, 2011; and De Vettere, 2002).

When a virtuous person responds courageously, for example, they wholeheartedly (as per their disposition) face and overcome difficulties for a good cause, as to do otherwise is to be cowardly (Annas, 2015:4). They will be able to discern the salient moral features of the situation and understand how to navigate the situation in conformity with their moral principles. They evaluate "actions in terms

of what is worth fighting for or enduring for", acting on these evaluations in a way that is in line with courage (Annas, 2015:4).

Annas (2015:5) makes the point that different virtues operate in different but reciprocal ways in different situations. The idea of reciprocity is also referred to as the 'unity' of virtue and suggests that our natural practical traits, such as bravery (amongst others), need to be developed intelligently (Annas, 2015). This intelligence is important because it is responsible for the formation and application of the virtues as a response to particular circumstance. It is central to the notion of a practitioner-focused approach to ethical HRM.

Given current purposes, it is important to notice that virtue can be developed over a lifetime through the intelligent response to experience, learning and education (Annas, 1995, 2011, 2015; Hursthouse, 2013; and Stichter, 2007a, 2013 and 2015). So, for example and with application to HRM, the development of good character would involve learning how to respond practically to HRM challenges over time. To develop the example of courage further, "becoming courageous is an ongoing process of learning, which starts in childhood and continues [during life]" (Annas, 2015:3). The HRM practitioner then needs to learn or experience "what is worthwhile and what is not" in terms of courage in the context of HRM (Ibid).

The intelligent development of virtue, as I will discuss in what follows, is analogous to developing a skill. When HRM practitioners develop moral skills in response to HRM circumstances, they enable ethical HRM convergence. In addition, that such development is accessible to HRM practitioners that are motivated to do so.

2.2. Virtue Seen as Skill

The process of learning a virtue is analogous to that of acquiring a practical skill (Annas, 1995, 2011, 2015; and Stichter, 2007a; Stichter, 2007b, 2013 and 2015). "The intuitive appeal of the ancient skill analogy for virtue rests on the idea that one practical activity – acting well – is like another prominent practical activity, working well" (Annas, 1995:229). When a practitioner develops virtue as a form of practical skill, they will be able to respond ethically. They will respond "to a situation…. like a skilled athlete or craftsman, who understands immediately what to do in a situation without explicitly having to apply rules (still less to get the answer from elsewhere by consulting a decision procedure), but whose decision comes from a disposition developed by intelligently acquiring and expressing virtue" (Annas, 2015:8).

The result is that the practitioner who develops moral expertise becomes capable of credibly influencing others (Tong, 1991) and building trust in organisations (Graham and Tarbell, 2006). [5] Moral experts are ethically self-directed; are able to understand and give reasons for their actions; and can adapt as the complexity and range of situations increases, without compromising their virtue (Annas, 2015:5).

5 Dienhart (1995) suggests that in the case of virtue, non-classical rationality applies, where expertise is the ability to evaluate a situation, assess evidence and come to a reasonable moral decision without necessarily having to follow rules.

Virtue and skill are analogous in several ways. They are similar in terms of motivation, they develop in similar ways and they are said to seek excellence. I will begin with the notion of motivation. Neither moral skills nor non-moral skills are intuitive; rather, both require development to master over long periods of time, notwithstanding that some practitioners may have some natural ability in either (Annas, 1995; Stichter, 2007b; and Stichter, 2015). Therefore, a practitioner requires motivation to acquire both moral and non-moral skills.

As we have seen, the development of practical skills can take the form of the development of intelligent responses to circumstance. The development of intelligent responses as a form of practical skills, in terms of the normative and the instrumental, are similar in that they rely on experience, learning and education.

Furthermore, the continuous development of ethical behaviours as a form of skill commits the practitioner to seeking excellence or to performing well in moral terms (Stichter, 2015). When a tennis player strives to be the best player, they are seeking excellence in the same way that a moral person seeks e*udaimonia* in virtue terms (Stichter, 2015).

The professional character of HRM would then be characterised by a group of professionals that are motivated to seek to develop their expertise so that they can intelligently respond to their circumstances. They seek excellence in the form of ethical convergence by developing the normative in the form of virtue skills.

The question that arises is: what form does virtue-as-skill take? The virtue-as-skill approach has been referred to in the recent literature as a form of moral competence. In their work on management

skills, Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2015) provide the following definition of moral competence, which is used in the rest of the report. Moral competency is a:

> set of knowledge, skills and attitudes and abilities acquired through experience, which in fact facilitate the engagement in ethical behaviours in a specific job… These moral competencies are nothing other than virtues, which are internal mental and will-related capacities acquired by the continuous development of ethical behaviours capable of responding in a consistent (i.e across different conditions or situations), stable (i.e through different times), and integrated (i.e in accordance with other similar competences) (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015:S166).[6]

2.3. Possible Objections

My current purpose is not to provide a complete defence of the account of virtue as a skill, but merely to show that this account is plausible and useful when thinking about ethical HRM. For this reason, I will only consider objections that bear directly on my current project. One of the concerns raised against the virtue-based approach is that it may be too demanding to be practical. The implication in

6 Whilst Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2015) do not specifically state it in their definition of moral competency, such a definition includes normative and technical components. In the same way as doctors and lawyers require medical and legal expertise, HRM professionals require the technical virtue of HRM practice.

HRM terms is that all HRM practitioners need to be moral experts or fully virtuous, potentially excluding many. If they are excluded because they are not fully virtuous, then the question arises as to whether this negates a virtue-based approach to HRM.

The objection is based on an interpretation of Hursthouse's (2000) virtue-based account of right action that suggests that an "action is right if and only if it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically do in the circumstances" (Stichter, 2011:73). Johnson (2003) is concerned that right action in this understanding is only applicable to the fully virtuous, potentially excluding those in the process of developing virtue – be that in action or learning. As very few can claim to be fully virtuous, this potentially excludes most HRM practitioners from ethical HRM and diminishes the usefulness of the virtue-as-skill approach. Therefore, Johnson (2003:811) argues that room needs to be made for a "genuine moral obligation to improve… character and to act in other ways that are appropriate only because [a person] could be a better person".

Stichter (2011) puts forward a partial answer to the challenge by suggesting that participants require motivation to continually improve and develop difficult virtues over long periods. Right action on the virtue-as-skill approach suggests that self-improving actions are also right, notwithstanding the narrow view of Hursthouse (2000). Stichter (2011:83) outlines the view in the following way:

> Implicit here is the idea that … actions are morally required as a necessary means to the end of acting virtuously, where acting virtuously is what morality requires of us… [t]he beginner literally cannot do what the expert does… [s]o the appropriate thing for a novice to do differs from the expert, and since both have differing abilities, there are different expectations. It is not the case that the differing

> standards mean that there's no right answer about what to do, but rather the appropriate thing to do is to some degree relative to what you can do [or be expected to do].

The potential is there for more than one response to be right in a virtue-based approach. In this sense, a virtue-as-skill approach can support the idea that the moral expectation of novices is different to that of the truly virtuous. Novices may benefit from the use of principles and rules, whilst the truly virtuous would not. It is possible then for a range of responses dependent on skill level and circumstantial requirement to be ethical, with the commitment to improvement. This would be the difference between being 'merely competent' and truly excellent. Those that are learning to be virtuous benefit from exposure to the response of what a virtuous person would do, whilst it is only a virtuous person who may have an alternative response to the competent one. The advantage of such a view is that whilst all should strive to become an ethical expert, not all will achieve this and so the idea of being ethically competent is more realistic both for normal adults and, in this case, HRM practitioners.

2.4. Virtue-as-Skill in Context

The exercise of moral skills as a practical response to complex demands in the workplace seems important for HRM practitioners, especially where a range of responses are possible (and perhaps required), without losing what is moral in the process. The approach suggests a partial answer to the HRM sceptics regarding role conflict. HRM practitioners, on this account, do not have to default to supporting managers and can develop an array of intelligent responses, which seek to balance interests in organisations.

The range of responses is also important when considering that HRM work differs in levels of complexity. SHRM (2012, 2014) and SABPP (2014) recognise from a world-of-work perspective that as work progresses from the simple to the complex – or in HRM terms from the impact on individuals through to the strategic – the required levels of moral expertise increase as HRM practitioners progress from practitioner to manager to executive.

Virtue, seen as skill, then, when applied to HRM suggests a multi-faceted approach to the idea of moral expertise and competency. The next step is to identify the moral skills required for HRM, if we understand that virtue is a skill and that such skill has value. Just as Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2015) identified the moral competencies required to meet the normative demands of management, we can attempt to identify the moral competencies and their use in HRM.

Chapter 3 HRM Moral Competence

One of the defining features of a professional is the ability to make good decisions in the context of their profession (Bebeau, 2008). The practical expert is said to be able to make accurate judgements regarding right or wrong in a given situation (Rest, 1986). The judgements, as we have seen, are an intelligent response in the form of technical and moral expertise. The HRM practitioner uses moral competencies in various combinations and at different times to make judgements in context. One way of describing the functioning of such expertise is to understand how it contributes to professional decision-making.

The aim of this chapter is to begin to identify moral competencies and provide an explanation of their use in HRM. The focus in this chapter will be on the less developed normative components of HRM moral competence. We will return to the subject of technical expertise in chapter 4 in more detail, when discussing the ethical HRM framework. A cardinal-virtue approach will be used to identify the normative components of HRM moral competence; where after their use in HRM decision-making will be discussed using Rest's (1986) four-stage ethical decision-making model as a basis.

A summary of the account of the moral components of HRM expertise and how they contribute to decision-making is provided in Table 1. The table starts with the cardinal virtues, provides moral competence definitions and then demonstrates how they are said to contribute to decision making, with their HRM equivalents.

3.1. HRM Moral Competencies

Identifying the virtues that are paramount to a profession is more difficult than gaining acceptance of the idea that virtue is in-and-of-itself important. There is a strong claim going back to Aristotle, Socrates and Plato that virtues are universal, with some being cardinal (i.e. core virtues) (De Vettere, 2002; and Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2013). Modern research psychology supports the idea of the commonality of virtue, notwithstanding historical, cultural or even religious differences (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, and Seligman, 2005:205).

Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2013) claim the cardinal virtues are a good starting point because they are directly relevant to professional decision-making. Moreover, HRM already recognises the relevance of the cardinal virtues; as they have their own equivalents in the HRM. This is not to say that cardinal virtues are exhaustive. Nevertheless, for the reasons mentioned, the focus will be on: prudence; justice; self-control; and courage as they pertain to HRM,[7] and in what follows I will provide short descriptions of these.

7 It is conceivable that more than the cardinal virtues are important for HRM practitioners. Stichter (2007b) suggests honesty as a generally important moral competency that can be added to the cardinal virtues in its own right, rather than be subsumed into other virtues. Secondly, there may be other requirements that are specific to HRM. An example is the importance of ethical care and attention to others (SABPP, 2013; 2017) which is often linked to HRM taking on the role of ethical educator in organisations (Carey, 1999). The suggestion is that the virtue-as-skill approach can accommodate a wide range of HRM moral competencies, while requiring further determination as the virtue-as-skill approach in HRM expands.

If HRM practitioners are to be moral experts, then the role of prudence (or practical wisdom) is particularly important in responding intelligently. Prudence is the intellectual virtue of good deliberation (De Vettere, 2002; Mele, 2012; and Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2013). Prudence can be thought of as a meta-virtue since it is responsible for the unity of the virtues. It is responsible for example, for determining what courageous or just action consists in, in a given circumstance.

Prudence is also important to HRM because it involves making value judgements about the ends being pursued (Stichter, 2015). This is not a matter of pursuing appropriate means to ends, but actually ensuring that the objective being pursued adds to human flourishing. Moreover, deliberation in HRM involves determining an ethical response, but also providing reasons as to why that approach is worthwhile pursuing. When pursuing ethical convergence in HRM, HRM practitioners deliberate on which response best balances the interests of people and organisations. Deliberation involves the evaluation of the alternatives available and selecting the best approach in terms of the normative impact on others (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015). A part of the evaluation is identifying how best to implement the selected approach and providing reasons as to why this should be so.

Justice is an interpersonal capability concerned with equity or fairness between people, or what Mele (2012) calls 'relationability'. Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2015:S168) see justice as a form of "giving each one what they are due", which in HRM terms means respecting the rights of employees and applying standards and laws with impartiality. The virtue of justice also has a role to play in correcting past mistakes such as in the case of affirmative action or when resolving conflicts over resources (for example, regarding remuneration within the organisation).

By contrast with justice, which has to do with the relations between people, self-control is an intrapersonal or 'character' virtue which enables one to "control one's own emotions and dominate the passions and instincts" (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015:169). Self-control requires the HRM practitioner to pursue self-knowledge, which improves moral intentionality and perhaps mitigates problems of HRM role duality. A component of self-knowledge is knowing when to be humble in demonstrating expertise, how to be appropriately respectful of others, modest in success, calm during a crisis and able to control one's anger when provoked. Self-knowledge is an integral part of the professional character of an HRM practitioner.

The last of the cardinal virtues is courage. Like self-control, courage is also an intrapersonal virtue. In our context, it is the "willingness to set difficult and costly goals that are morally beneficial and face difficulties with determination" (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015:S169). Courage is an important part of the successful implementation of moral decisions (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2013). HRM practitioners with courage avoid diluting important moral goals because they are able to persevere and overcome moral obstacles, challenges or adversity, such as in the case of ensuring that women are paid equally to men for equal work and that, in general, historical inequalities are addressed.

The cardinal virtues are normatively important for HRM and in understanding their relevance to HRM, we need to understand how they may contribute to good HRM decision-making. It is HRM decision-making that forms the basis of a practitioner-focused ethical approach to HRM convergence.

3.2. HRM Decision-Making

Moral competence is relevant to HRM practitioners because it supports or improves HRM decision making. Individuals are said to use a number of steps from the moment a problem occurs until a given behaviour results (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2013:718). I will show how moral competence supports decision-making by providing a short description of how Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2013) link expertise to decision-making, where after I will describe how this is relevant to HRM.

Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2013) argue that moral competence can contribute significantly to business by improving decision-making. In order to show how this is possible, they refer to Rest's (1986) four-stage decision-making model: moral sensitivity, moral judgement, moral motivation and moral character. The four-stage decision-making model is a good example of a practitioner-focused approach to the normative and according to Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2013) relies on the expertise of the individual to make good decisions.

Moral sensitivity is the awareness that there is a moral problem, and such awareness is required before taking any decisions. It is conceivable that the HRM practitioner becomes aware of moral problems through moral competence. For Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2013) prudence is primary during this stage, with justice playing a supporting role. However, it is conceivable that in the case of unfair remuneration, for example, one's capacity for justice may be as important as one's capacity for prudence. It is difficult to understand on what basis deliberation is possible, without one first being aware of an injustice (in terms of equality, in the example). Nor would technical expertise be useful at this point, as such expertise requires normative guidance. Such descriptions then, are

indicative that moral competencies are best understood as working in combination in different ways and at different times to support ethical decision-making in context.

The second stage is moral judgement, where HRM practitioners assess the 'good' and 'bad' of each act, the aim of which is to morally label every possible act, irrespective of personal interest (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2013:718). In this account, justice supports prudence in ensuring that any resulting decisions are normatively optimal by considering the normative impact on others. It is conceivable that, at this stage, technical expertise also becomes important, as the resulting decision requires a consideration of fairness and the technical expertise to resolve fairness using a remuneration approach.

The third stage is moral motivation, where a willingness or intention to act develops. At this stage, the greater the development of justice, the more motivated the HRM practitioner will be to act. Such intentionality is supported by other virtues such as self-control, where the reason for the behaviour remains aligned with the moral intent. In order to be morally virtuous for example, such actions cannot be motivated by pride, anger or revenge.

Finally, the fourth stage is moral character. Rest (1986) sees ethical behaviour as the result of the judgements we make using our character, much in the same way that moral competence results in intelligent responses in the virtue-as-skills approach. This involves turning moral judgement and motivation into the demonstration of moral behaviour. In order to do so, according to Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2013) additional support is required in the form of courage, because courage involves removing obstacles by working out the sequence of steps to take to avoid distractions and to work around impediments (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015:S167). The

resulting moral behaviour is a function of the unified nature of moral competence and is seen as excellent when judged by the criteria of justice (Bastons, 2008:398), or the normative assessment of the impact it has on others.

I will use the example of performance management in HRM to illustrate further how moral competence contributes to professional decision-making. In performance management, it is common HRM practice to moderate individual performance ratings after the fact. Such moderation is seen as important mainly due to deficiencies in the capability of managers to rate effectively (Fletcher, 2001; and Gibbon, 2015). But do current conceptions of moderation meet the requirements of ethical HRM convergence? The dilemma is weighing up the perceived 'objectivity' of moderation with the impact on those individuals that end up over-or-underrated, leading to employee dissatisfaction.

The capacity for justice makes one sensitive to employee dissatisfaction, such as in the case of the impact of moderation. Moderation occurs when HRM practitioners—amongst others—align performance ratings against an idealised organisational performance curve after managers have assessed individual performance. The HRM practitioner is said to be prudent when they deliberate on such dilemmas, such as the fairness of moderation in performance management. For example, forms of fairness in performance management include: reasonable target setting; the capacity to perform; and recognising performance fairly (Fletcher, 2001; and Winstanley and Stuart-Smith, 1996). The HRM practitioner may use the capacity for self-control to discern that the problem lies with the power of managers, even though the practitioner may instinctively relate to managers and to being able to control the outcomes of performance management. The HRM practitioner may then reason that moderation fails to recognise performance fairly because changes are often made without consent, resulting in a lack of transparency and distrust.

As part of deliberating on moderation, the good HRM practitioner requires technical capacity to evaluate potential HRM alternatives that may help resolve the dilemma. The HRM practitioner may reason that it is better to change moderation from a model of altering ratings to one of moderating the quality of management actions. Performance can be fairly recognised, if managers in the setting and measurement of individual performance actively engage employees (Winstanley and Stuart-Smith, 1996).

Knowing what to do and being motivated to do so are insufficient to turn moral intent into moral action, which is the final stage of decision-making. If HRM practitioners want to moderate management actions, then courage is also required. Courage is required to hold managers accountable for their actions, if the goal is the fair recognition of performance. The virtuous practitioners will need to maintain a positive attitude, demonstrating patience and resilience when confronting managers regarding their attitudes to performance and their capacity to engage and rate staff fairly. Furthermore, concrete actions will be required to address and work around distractions, such as recalcitrant managers.

Moral competencies, then, operate together and contribute in various ways during the process of HRM decision-making. We have seen how—in the case of performance management—fair moderation can lead to better normative outcomes by having a positive impact on others; and how such moral competence in action can contribute to ethical HRM convergence. When decision-making is required in, a professional context such as HRM, then technical capacity (i.e. HRM expertise) also needs to be considered—in the same way that doctors and lawyers require medical and legal expertise respectively.

The resultant ethical behaviour is not only a form of good judgement, motivated in a way that is specific to HRM, but is an ongoing form of the ethical moderation of interests within organisations that is resilient and therefore sustainable. The next chapter explores how the progressive nature of HRM work creates a series of ethical demands that require consideration regarding the level of practical ethical expertise—both technical and moral—and decision-making required by HRM practitioners.

Chapter 4 Ethical HRM Framework

HRM practitioners can be practical experts who determine right or wrong by providing reasons in the context of, or as a response to, the demands of HRM in organisations. The HRM practitioner should develop moral expertise as the demands of HRM work progressively escalate in complexity from entry to executive level, as they cannot merely rely on policy to deal with the challenges characteristic of HRM. The HRM practitioner's skill set includes: technical competence; situational understanding and the moral expertise required to respond correctly to ethical demands.

One of the ways to understand the range of possible HRM responses is the further development of the idea that work and expertise are progressively linked. Where the links occur, it is possible to describe forms of right action, understood in terms of ethical convergence. This chapter creates a framework that uses the stages of H. and S. Dreyfus's model of skill acquisition (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1991 and 2004)[8] as its basis. This method allows us to link levels of moral expertise development to HRM levels of work (SABPP, 2014). The Dreyfus model is useful because the development of expertise is akin to that of moral development in the virtue-as-skill approach (Stichter, 2007a; Stichter, 2007b; and Stichter, 2011) and the model matches the experience levels required of HRM (SABPP, 2014:23-35).

8 Hereafter referred to as the Dreyfus model.

The HRM practitioner can use the framework and attendant descriptions to engage with the demands of HRM and begin to understand the forms of technical and moral expertise required to do so. I begin with a brief description of the Dreyfus model.

4.1. The Dreyfus Model

The Dreyfus model identifies five stages of skills development that are akin to the stages of development in the virtue-as-skills approach (Stichter, 2007b). The five stages are novice; advanced beginner; competent performer; proficient performer; and expert. Stichter (2013: 4-7) describes the stages (through the example of learning to drive a car) as follows: Initially, the novice follows simple and context-free rules, such as shifting gears when the engine noise increases. Simple rules are inadequate when conditions change, such as when there is heavy traffic or rain, requiring the driver to develop maxims that accommodate situational requirements.

The advanced beginner begins to notice new features of situations that cannot be recognised without experience. A maxim for driving may include changing gears when the engine noise gets to a certain level on a hill. Maxims, in turn, may become insufficient when the number of situational factors requiring consideration increase—for example, when the driver needs to make a choice between taking different routes based on the importance of such factors as the traffic, weather and time required.

The competent performer needs to make choices about the significance of factors, using a plan, approach or perspective. The competent performer is then responsible for making the choice and for its outcome. Dependent on the outcome, the practitioner receives feedback regarding the need for improvement. Positive outcomes reinforce the use of the same approach when similar future situations occur, whilst negative outcomes suggest a change in approach.

In contrast to the competent performer, the proficient performer no longer uses rules or even makes a choice but rather sees the situation for what it is and takes appropriate action without conscious effort. The final stage is one of expertise characterised by intuitive decision-making based on seeing similarities with previous experiences. In unfamiliar circumstances, the expert will need to deliberate on what choice to make or action to take, which may diminish the quality of their response, for it is the circumstance that determines the principle and not the other way around.

The Dreyfus model suggests that acting ethically is a type of skill that is grounded in learning from experience, where there is a similarity between the expert and Aristotle's prudent person or *phronimos* and it is on this "account that ethical expertise will be compatible with a broadly neo-Aristotelian approach to ethics" (Stichter, 2013:7). The Dreyfus model emphasises the importance of the practitioner's skills in determining what action is right. This is a form of response to the context and is an expression of moral competence or virtue, which develops over time and with practice (Stichter, 2011). I shall apply the Dreyfus model to the acquisition of virtue by providing a contextual framework that describes the stages of ethical expertise development in HRM.

4.2. Ethical HRM Framework

A summary of the proposed ethical framework is provided in Table 2, using performance management as an example. The table outlines a framework that structures HRM experience into a number of stages akin to the stages in the Dreyfus model of skills acquisition. For each stage, a description of good HRM practice is provided as an expression of the level of expertise characteristic of that level, and the technical and moral competencies associated with it. The aim is to foster ethical behaviour at each level by describing such expertise.

My premise is that moral competence is used and developed during decision-making in various ways when making required judgements (as described in chapter 3). In this way, all the cardinal virtues are required for each work level. Whilst the exact combination of moral competence used per level is dependent on circumstance, what can be described is how the level of demand changes. So, for each level of expertise, descriptions of expertise development—ranging from the novice to the expert—are provided in terms of their technical and normative components.

We assume in this framework that in order to meet the requirements of each level, HRM practitioners require moral competence that includes technical and normative skills. For example, the HRM executive is understood as the HRM expert, having mastered an array of skills enabling them to lead on agreeing organisation[al] principles – ethics, strategy, culture, whilst showing judgement and being a credible and trustworthy role model (SHRM, 2012; and SABPP, 2013). They are able to do so by "determining integrational [sic] commonalities across complex organisations" in the case of performance management (SABPP, 2014), whilst prudently considering all possible moral principles,

their impact or fairness, and applying the appropriate principles with courage and self-control (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2015).

Elements of performance management are used to describe both the technical and normative expertise required at each level of the framework. Descriptions of technical competence per HRM element is well established (SABPP, 2014:24-35). However, a gap exists in terms of the description of HRM moral expertise. The work of Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2015) is adapted in order to fill the gap. Behaviours demonstrative of prudence, justice, courage or self-control are applied to the levels of HRM work. It is important to recognise that the model is over-simplified in various ways and that further work would be required in order to develop a more satisfactory account.

If an HR executive in a complex organisation is working on the strategy, policy and process element of performance management (PM), then they are required to identify the PM principles for performance improvement that is appropriate for HRM convergence and will prudently select a workable approach. By HRM convergence, I mean, in this context, the best accommodation of the interests of the people and the organisation as it pertains to the situation. They will use their moral competence as described in chapter 3 to make judgements regarding which PM principles are applicable. In considering possible morale alternatives, the impact on people and their rights are assessed and this is done in conjunction with stakeholders.

A common example at this level is benefits eligibility. Some organisations pay benefits to full time employees but pay no benefits for contract or part time workers on the justification that such an approach is cost effective and may not be legally required. On such a justification, it may be perceived by contract workers that HR considers them to be less valuable to the organisation.

An expert HR executive, being morally sensitive, may reach a very different conclusion for example when deliberating from a convergence perspective. If the accepted performance management principle is one of pay for performance, the HR executive may reason that if contract workers perform well then it is fair to make benefits available to them. By making benefits available to contract workers at their level of contribution, contract workers will feel respected and will be motivated to perform even better.

Such a decision in its execution will require courage to overcome the naysayers and advocates of cost reduction, whilst it may require that the HR executive maintain their moral intentionality by ensuring that they do not see contract workers as less valuable than full time workers. The benefits to the organisation are greater motivation and less staff turnover for what can be considered a slight increase in cost, whilst contract employees feel fairly treated and respected.

The proposed framework is limited to testing the notion of the progressive nature of work and expertise as it pertains to moral competence in HRM. The framework, whilst analogous to expertise development differs somewhat to the Dreyfus model. Firstly, the Dreyfus model proposes the development of skill from scratch, whilst the ethical HRM framework acknowledges that participants are new to HRM rather than being ethical novices more generally.

Secondly, the Dreyfus model refers to the development of single skills such as driving a car, whilst the ethical HRM framework requires the HRM practitioner to develop multiple forms of technical and moral expertise through experience. The next step is to describe in more detail the various development stages by continuing with the example of performance management.

4.3. Novice to Expert

The proposed ethical HRM framework suggests that the HRM practitioner will be an individual contributor at the early HRM career stage. An individual contributor is someone who does not have anyone reporting to them. By the end of the novice stage, the HRM practitioner is able to understand, recognise, reason and explain HR practice or policy as a form of technical skill, usually outlined in HRM and organisational codes (SABPP, 2014).

To illustrate this stage through the example of performance management (PM), we can say that the novice would be able to use basic PM knowledge and theory to engage with line managers and staff in order to ensure that the implementation of the PM policy is fair, reasonable and consistent (Gibbon, 2015). The novice would be able to recognise and explain how the PM policy is fair, reasonable and consistent within a limited range of factors and without having necessarily given input to the design of the policy. The novice would engage with stakeholders using their PM knowledge in a positive or respectful way, regarding the proper or justifiable application of standards and laws (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015). In situations where they are unsure, the novice would ask for advice from a manager/teacher who could point to the components of a task, or who could share their experience in dealing with particular stakeholders.

The expectation of the novice can be illustrated when dealing with the common problem of performance rating bias (Fletcher, 2001 and Winstanley and Stuart-Smith, 1996). In simple terms, some managers give higher ratings to those that they like. Where the implementation of a reasonable policy is unfair, the novice should be able to use their moral sensitivity to identify the problem, as the

starting point of generating a moral judgement, as we saw in the last chapter, with Rest's (1986) decision-making model.

The novice—as a trusted advisor—consults with the line manager to resolve the problem without being dissuaded from the required standard through a lack of courage or self-control.[9] In this case, considerations of justice enable the novice to recognise the unfairness of the action, while courage and self-control enable them to execute the correct action in the face of authority. In such cases, the novice is morally sensitive to the rationale and execution of simple normative standards such as the fair implementation of PM policy.

However, HRM practitioners often encounter a variety of situations in the workplace that challenge simple rules. For example, managers often apply PM rules inconsistently, either tending to overrate or underrate their staff. In this situation, the manager may have followed the PM process, but ended up with the wrong result. It would be unreasonable to expect a novice to be able to deal with such a problem, where a potential deviation from policy is required.

9 Whilst it is true that senior HRM practitioners formulate HR policy, HRM is often dependent on line managers for the implementation of such policy, which makes HRM very different from other professions such as medicine and law and is perhaps the source of much of the ethical complexity within HRM. Additionally, HRM practitioners do not yet have the moral authority accorded to a doctor or a lawyer, emanating from their expertise or relationship to power.

If the PM policy, for example, suggested two formal rating sessions a year, the HRM practitioner at the advanced beginner stage might deviate from the policy by suggesting additional rating sessions to build management capability, formulating the maxim that management capability to rate fairly improves with experience (Gibbon, 2015). The HRM practitioner can make a judgement call about how to implement the maxim, by differentiating between managers in terms of their capability, allowing some more time to develop and being able to justify such deviations.

Therefore, a different level of moral judgement is required by the advanced beginner when adaptation is involved in implementing or managing HRM processes. Here, the HRM practitioner would "apply, diagnose and challenge stakeholders", and use "reasoning to resolve problems and deviations" (SHRM, 2012; and SABPP, 2014) in order to derive their own maxims, using their judgement to implement them in a way that ensures the meeting of accepted norms and standards (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015). The relevant ethical virtues here are primarily for prudence, justice and courage. The HRM practitioner should make prudent decisions whilst taking into consideration any special circumstances or maxims for the proper application of standards (justice) and being able to find ways around any obstacles (courage).

The first two stages of the ethical HRM framework require the HRM practitioner to develop from interpreting to diagnosing normative requirements and responding accordingly using the organisation as a reference point. This is a qualitative change in the level of moral competence required, although the approach is similar. The assumption is that they are largely given the policies and practices; in the case of the advanced beginner, though, they can diagnose and adapt policies somewhat to fit the maxims they develop.

The next stage of work complexity is HRM management, which typically is about managing or leading a team, unit or specialist practice. In this context, policy is "developed, monitored and evaluated" (SHRM, 2012; and SABPP, 2014) putting the necessary normative structures in place, which are then delegated to more junior HRM practitioners to implement in conjunction with line managers.

HRM managers are competent when they play a deliberative (or prudent) role in selecting the best response to complex situations. HRM managers are able to do so by attaching significance to relevant factors by referencing the "best professional and ethical standards" (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015:S168) and judging which is the best or fairest for policy formulation and implementation. The significance they attach to individual factors is often derived from the principles identified by senior HR managers who are proficient in setting organisational standards.

A wide array of responses is available at this level. If we return to the example of benefits: the HRM practitioner may consider—over and above the cost—issues of attraction; motivation; performance; remuneration; and retention. The HRM practitioner may, for example, select performance as the predominant factor (amongst others) in determining the fairest approach; and may then make a policy choice in terms of the best benefit available as part of a bespoke pay-for-performance approach (Ulrich, 2012)[10], allowing employees to choose those available benefits that are best for them.

10 'Pay for performance' is a traditional best-practice approach in HRM (Ulrich, 2012), though several others exist, including: performance as a form of development (Winstanley and Stuart-Smith, 1996); and paying for behaviour or virtue (Buetow and Entwistle, 2011). The competent HRM practitioner not only decides on which factors are significant in the context, but also judges which HRM approach is applicable, with full consideration of any normative implications, when formulating and implementing policy.

Providing the freedom to choose is a good example of how a mature HRM professional maintains moral intentionality as an expression of self-knowledge: by providing free choice, they are acknowledging that they may not know better than others what is of optimal benefit to them.

Furthermore, the HRM manager monitors and evaluates when implementing through others, using feedback to identify and correct mistakes as soon as possible. A possible error may include allowing a manager too much time to develop performance-rating capability, affecting fairness in their team.

Many policy decisions require change and helping others make decisions. The HRM manager also plays an important role in educating others, be they HR practitioners, managers or employees requiring significant self-knowledge or control (Carey, 1999).

Proficiency at a senior-manager or business-function level requires HRM practitioners to "set organisation[al] standards, engage stakeholders, agree principles, manage trends and provide ethical advice" (SHRM, 2012; and SABPP, 2014). The proficient practitioner is able to decide—in an ethical sense—what to do in such complex circumstances, by knowing which goal or perspective to take because of their experience and deep insight (Stichter, 2007b). In order to identify, sequence, combine and apply applicable principles the senior HRM practitioner considers all possible moral alternatives when it comes to setting standards that will cascade throughout the organisation. The search is for what is morally appropriate for each party, whilst respecting the rights of all affected by any decisions made and dealing with any inherent ethical dilemmas (Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina, 2015:S168). The proficient HRM practitioner understands the nature of excellence and is able—in terms of PM—to interpret the performance improvement implications of the organisational strategy.

One of the ethical dilemmas that proficient HRM practitioners often face is the question of how much a CEO should earn in comparison to that of the lowest paid worker (Hartung, 2015). At this level, it is better to deliberate on the virtue or principle required than to try to make a decision regarding the technical alternatives. The expectation is that the proficient HRM practitioner is able to define the form of discrimination and the conditions that will enable a standard to be set for remuneration decisions. For example, the amount a CEO earns may be a function of their value in the market, their contribution and risk they take. This being the case (and as long as the same principles are used to calculate other pay), it may be permissible for the CEO to earn more than shop floor workers.

A shift occurs at the level of 'proficiency'. It is at this level that normative considerations—in the form of virtues—become more important than the technical proficiency of the HRM practitioner. The senior HRM practitioner is involved in understanding the organisation in context and setting applicable standards, rather than (as on the previous, 'competent' level) designing or selecting the best technical alternative that meets normative requirements. In the case of performance improvement, the HRM practitioner may consider extending the definition of performance to include, as key principles: environmental factors; customer feedback; and the impact on the community—rather than just financial performance. These considerations form the rationale that will help HRM managers select the right alternative in terms of policy.

After 15 years or more of requisite experience, the senior HRM practitioner potentially becomes an executive, who "leads on agreeing organisation principles in the form of ethics, strategy and culture" as a "credible and trustworthy role model" (SHRM, 2012; and SABPP, 2014). In terms of moral competence, there is not much difference between 'proficiency' and 'mastery', outside of context and the way in which moral competence is demonstrated. Proficiency gives way to expertise when a change occurs from "searching to knowing what to do" in ethical terms (Stichter, 2013:7). The expert

intuitively, and with speed, “knows what actions are required and how to perform them in that situation without detached calculation or having to weigh alternatives” (Stichter, 2011:78).

The expert’s ethical intuition is also able to anticipate likely future events (Stichter, 2007b) and, if likened to the notion of being a *phronimos* (De Vettere, 2002:167), can add considerably to strategic discussions within organisations. The HRM expert can aid in the search for opportunity by using their intuition and providing advice regarding ethical permissibility. For example, the HRM expert can help the organisation to decide on which basis they can invest in countries where human rights are under pressure. As such, the HRM expert provides the strategic and ethical context for the people-focused agenda of organisations.

4.4. Implications and Limitations

The development of virtue as skill occurs as the level of work demands increase in sequential stages over time. This involves the adaptation of pre-HR forms of virtue—for example, prudence and justice—to the demands of HRM (as outlined in the ethical HRM framework). The ethical HRM framework is an ideal developmental trajectory, as the acquisition of moral skills requires intentionality and motivation, with HRM practitioners ideally seeking experience, education and guidance to develop moral skills where required.

Some HRM practitioners are more motivated or intentional than others and so allowances in the ethical HRM framework are required. For example, the ethical HRM framework requires executive HRM practitioners to be ethical experts (or *phronimos* in Aristotelian terms); for some HRM

practitioners this may never be the case, and as Stichter (2011) suggests the expectation for most at this level will simply be to be “the competent ethical performer”.

Another form of asymmetry exists outside of moral skills. Work experience is not always equivalent to work complexity in the ethical HRM framework. There are times when the HRM practitioner encounters difficult ethical dilemmas that are above their skill and experience level such as: in the case of organisational corruption; or the events leading to the Marikana massacre. In the case of Marikana, few foresaw the problems that derived from the ‘outsourcing’ of ethical responsibility for labour relations to the police (Meyer, 2017). HRM practitioners may seek recourse in education or guidance from more senior HRM practitioners within the organisation. When lacking these resources and when faced with complex work experience situations, HRM practitioners may seek recourse from professional HR associations. Even in unique situations, where the expert or proficient HRM practitioner cannot rely on intuition (Stichter, 2007b); it is conceivable that finding another expert may help.

The ethical HRM framework is an ideal developmental trajectory for practical experts such as HRM practitioners. It is true to say that if Socrates took up HRM, he might have a finely attuned sense of justice but not much technical skill. HRM, then, requires both technical and moral skills in the same way that medicine and law do. These moral competencies develop in sequential stages over time. As expertise develops, important shifts occur. At the level of management, the HRM practitioner is less reliant on technical skills than before, and this reliance diminishes further as they move to proficiency and finally to the level of expert. Therefore, if Socrates pursued HRM technical knowledge over time in conjunction with his virtue expertise, he would become an HR expert, as opposed to the HRM practitioner who pursued HR technical skills, but not virtue.

The development of moral competence in HRM is primarily dependent on the motivation and intentionality of the HRM practitioner and the next chapter addresses the question of how personal development can be helpful.

Chapter 5 Development of HRM Ethical Expertise

In the last chapter, I provided an account of the ideal trajectory of the development of practical expertise in HRM in the form of an ethical HRM framework. My focus then was on the 'what' of HRM: what sort ethical and technical competence the practitioner should have at each level of work. The question now arises as to how this development can be facilitated. What steps can be taken by HRM practitioners to develop ethical competence?

An aspirant profession such as HRM is keenly interested in developing the capacity of its members to better meet the demands of the profession. The aim of personal development is the improvement of how practitioners think or act (Bebeau, 2008). Improvement is understood within the framework of the virtue-as-skill approach, and, more specifically, the development of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, self-control and courage. By developing the cardinal virtues, the HRM practitioner comes to act wisely in attaining ethical convergence; using good judgement to deal effectively with the complexity inherent in HR; and, especially, to mitigate the problem of role duality.

I will begin with a short overview of the current approach to ethical HRM education and identify some shortcomings-such as the tendency of current forms of ethical HRM education to favour abstract knowledge, rather than focusing on the development of practical skills. Thereafter I will discuss how the critical examination of ethical decision-making using a 'reflection-based' learning approach can be used to develop moral competence. Finally, I will return to the ethical HRM framework (see chapter 4) to discuss how moral competence at the various work levels of HRM can be facilitated.

5.1. HRM Education

Practitioners can enter HRM without any formal HRM education. Those without formal HRM education have a choice regarding university management programmes and ongoing awareness training carried out by HR professional associations such as the SABPP and SHRM. The traditional focus in HRM education is on the functional nature of HRM (an example of which would be the 'HR Standards' of the SABPP). There are two dominant themes in the functional view: the first focuses on the rights and responsibilities of employees and organisations (such as in the case of employee relations); and the second encompasses issues of justice and fairness (as illustrated previously in the example of performance management) (Van Buren and Greenwood, 2013).

An exclusive focus on the functional components of HRM runs the risk of ill-equipping practitioners to deal with the normative complexity of HRM work and ignores the potential role of HRM in organisations to contribute to ethical development (Winstanley, 1996; Van Buren and Greenwood, 2013). Winstanley (et al., 1996) call for HRM education to embrace the political and social dynamics of HRM, especially given inherent organisational tensions. Stakeholder analysis, assessing bundles of HRM practices and understanding the implications of strategic HRM are thought to be some ways to mitigate concerns regarding ethical education in HRM (Van Buren and Greenwood, 2013).

Few will contest the importance of the need for HRM education that extends beyond the functional and into the ethical, nor the merit of the above recommendations. However, current education approaches such as those outlined by Van Buren and Greenwood (2013), seem to favour abstract ethical knowledge over the development of practical ethical skills (Molewijk et al, 2008). Abstract ethical knowledge in the form of codes and rules has limited impact as we have seen (Chapter 1) and

limited ability to account for HRM judgement. There is a perceived gap between abstract knowledge and the actual experiences of practitioners in the workplace, which creates frustration and ineffective decision-making (Molewijk et al, 2008).

It is important to keep in mind that whilst HRM expertise is conceived of here as a practical form of virtue and that whilst such expertise develops naturally as a response to the circumstances of HRM, the quality of such responses improves through the critical examination of experience. Crucially, such forms of evaluation can be guided through education. In the same way that a driver may learn to change gears in response to the increase in engine noise, a driving instructor can teach the learner driver to do so before they damage the gearbox.

Skills-based education then, differs in intent and design to abstract knowledge-based ethical programmes. Knowledge-based programmes tend to be more focused on the functional content of HRM, rather than exploring the practical implications of the material. In contrast, skills-based programmes concentrate on the skills required to apply content as a form of 'how to' in the context of the workplace. In the context of a profession, the concern is with practical ethical decision-making and its application (Mintz, 2006). The focus on practical decision-making links with the moral competence approach outlined in chapter 4, as moral competence is the capacity to make HRM decisions in concrete HRM circumstances.

I want to focus in some detail on the critical examination of decision-making in context as a practical form of virtue. The critical examination of decision-making is one way to develop moral competence (Mintz, 2006). There are no other accounts of virtue development in HRM that exist to my knowledge, so I will focus on critical examination and decision-making as central to a practitioner-focused

approach. The critical examination of decision-making in context is useful for developing moral competence because it requires the HRM learner to develop responses that go deeper than mere content knowledge when exposed to HRM examples.

Because of their ability to develop character and their capacity to convert plans into action, virtue-based learning programmes can be more effective than functional approaches in the workplace. The programmes allow HRM practitioners to bridge the gap between theory and practice by reflecting on ethical judgements and moving beyond the rules to improve contextual HRM responses. To enable HRM practitioners to develop moral competence further, I propose a specific 'reflection' based model of ethical education.

5.2. Reflection in HRM Development

According to Mintz (2006), reflection on virtue judgements in professional practice is one way of learning how to make better ethical decisions by providing insight and fostering understanding. By reflection, Mintz (2006:100) means the ability to "analyse and synthesise experiences, [so that] learning can be applied to new situations" or errors corrected.[11] This form of reflection on action seeks to explore

11 I will hereafter use the term "reflection" in Mintz's (2006) sense.

> ...why we acted as we did, what dynamics occurred in the group interaction, and what questions, images or actions we form that we can draw upon in future practice…Finally, we evaluate our understanding of the situation in light of our reflections and consider whether to change our approach to similar situations in the future, and how we might apply what we have learnt to other situations (Mintz, 2006:100).

The ability to improve the understanding of any situation using reflection in HRM education is dependent on providing material, content, examples and case studies that stimulate reflection and evaluation regarding "how alternative courses of [normative decision making] or action, impact others" (Mintz, 2006:101) in the context of ethical HRM demands.

Reflection, as a learning approach, is dependent on providing a particular form or content to stimulate critical examination of HRM practice. In terms of HRM practice, a link can be made with the ethical HRM framework discussed in Chapter 4. The linking of the ethical HRM framework to learning programmes may go some ways to answering questions regarding what, how, when and perhaps whom to train in HRM (Barber, 1999).

Virtue-based learning then is a practical-skills approach that uses reflection to examine HRM judgements critically within the content of the ethical HRM framework. The quality of the learning is dependent on practitioners: identifying the moral problem presented; developing moral arguments, that concern the problem; and converting concerns into plans for action that are ethically responsible [and implementable] (Bebeau, 2008).

5.3. Virtue based HRM Curriculum

I will now focus on proposing a virtue-based learning curriculum for HRM practitioners. Table 3 summarises a proposed reflection-based learning programme for HRM practitioners, which includes a taxonomy of different forms of reflection linked to HRM work demands. This approach links normative knowledge requirements with forms of reflection-based pedagogy at the different levels of HRM to create learning opportunities aimed at improving ethical decision-making. Reflection creates opportunities for HRM practitioners to explore ways in which they might use virtue-ethical reasoning to develop ethical responses to HRM issues, based on ethical and HRM knowledge appropriate to the level of HRM work demands.

Much as in the case of the ethical HRM framework in Chapter 4, the reflection-based learning approach begins with the novice or individual contributor as its foundation. There are many ways to explore HRM responsibilities practically at this level. They include the moral competencies already identified (Chapter 3), the proposed ethical HRM framework (Chapter 4) and relevant examples of HRM judgement.

Students have the opportunity to ask and respond to questions in order to learn how to formulate their own responses and react to the comments of others (Mintz, 2006). For example, the novice can practice responses to dealing with difficult managers, who resist following the performance management policy correctly. The aim of the foundational level is to enable the HRM practitioner to understand, recognise, reason, explain and--to some extent--justify HRM policy in context.

The advanced beginner, who manages HRM processes, will benefit from an introductory ethical HRM course that includes information about HRM frameworks, stakeholders and the ethics underpinning HRM practices, such as in the case of performance management. The programme includes topics such as: the ethical responsibilities owed to stakeholders; and balancing employee and employer interests, amongst others, using the HR body of knowledge (Van Buren and Greenwood, 2013).

An inquiry-based pedagogy is used to challenge participants to identify relevant principles and features of a situation that will help them to discover important relationships and further develop analytical and reasoning skills (Mintz, 2006). The development of analytical skills is important when advanced beginners begin to develop their own ethical maxims as they adapt HRM policies.

The competent HRM practitioner requires the skill to analyse the ethical demands of the different HRM functional areas, which mirrors the shift from interpreting and diagnosing (at novice and advanced beginner levels), to developing, monitoring and evaluating policy. Reflective discussion helps HRM practitioners to become more aware of the learning process, by focusing on assessing their participation in or response to situations (Mintz, 2006). Normative self-awareness enables the HRM practitioner to use this reflective process for more effective ethical decision-making and so to take the lead on policy development. For example, the HRM practitioner learns how to take the lead in a normatively self-aware way when engaging with relevant stakeholders.

When HRM practitioners are proficient, they seek to set organisational standards by identifying moral principles and searching through available moral alternatives. Advanced HRM programmes that include the analysis of strategic HRM and social change (Van Buren and Greenwood, 2013) are useful

starting points; however, it is when exploratory discussion uses critical reasoning to arrive at alternative explanations of real world situations that is important (Mintz, 2006). The proficient HRM practitioner learns how to weigh up the various performance management alternatives and provide an explanation of how their preferred approach is normatively better than others are.

Finally, when HRM practitioners are moral experts (at executive level) they intuitively know what actions to take to master a situation and have the experience to anticipate likely future events. The expert is able to model normative behaviour and serve as a guide to others. When guiding others, a coaching pedagogy can be used to create a collaborative relationship to facilitate normative or personal development outcomes (Grant et al, 2010). These outcomes are beneficial when dealing with complex situations or ambiguity at this level.

HRM practitioners, then, can develop their moral competence by using a lifelong reflection-based learning approach that in its practical form can be accommodated in a programme of continuous professional development. The outline provided is a preliminary one regarding the possibility of a virtue-based learning approach to ethical HRM education. More work is required to develop a more detailed virtue-based learning curriculum for HRM, as Mintz (2006) has done for ethical programmes in accounting.

5.4. Implications

HRM requires a multi-level curriculum that includes abstract HRM ethical knowledge and practical learning for each level of HRM work. Extensive work is available regarding the knowledge

requirements of ethical HRM (Van Buren and Greenwood, 2013) and some of the normative requirements for the HR body of knowledge (SABPP, 2014). However, further development is required regarding reflective learning and ethical decision-making in HRM to create a well-rounded curriculum.

Moreover, such a curriculum needs to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate some of the asymmetries identified in the ethical HRM framework. The curriculum needs to be able to accommodate students and current HRM practitioners at various levels of experience and understanding. For example, it may be possible to be designated a 'Master HRM Practitioner' by the SABPP (with a master's degree in a relevant area and over 5 years' experience) without having formally engaged with any ethical issues in HRM.

An indispensable part of continuous professional and virtue development is the importance of experience. In both the abstract-knowledge and practical-skills sense, it is difficult for students with little experience to understand the impact of ethical education. One way of addressing this is to have students role-play moral actions, allowing for reflection on action to occur. In this case, the aim is to discern improvements and apply the learning to different situations (Mintz, 2006). Although at a novice level, the simulation of moral action may have some advantages, it does not meet the criterion of demonstrating contextual ethical behaviour required at an increased level of moral expertise. The advantage of the multi-level learning approach in Table 3 is that real experience replaces role-playing.

If virtue is seen as foundational to ethical HRM then ethical education forms part of the development of the character of HRM practitioners and their professional identities. Reflection, and learning through decision-making, do not merely imply critical thinking in the example of the novice, but include the development of the virtuous responses of participants (i.e. the development of responses

involving prudence, courage, self-control, and justice); or what is called developing the "cognitive moral capability" of the profession (Mintz, 2006). Such responses or 'mental maps' form part of the character of the HRM practitioner and result in ethical behaviour at the required level of moral competence, where the practitioner intends to develop virtuously.

The development of moral competence, then, is central to the ability of HRM practitioners to develop the capacity for making good judgements. Moral competence can be developed through examining HRM judgements critically, which can be fostered through a reflection-based learning curriculum. The capacity to develop moral expertise is important to the HRM profession as a way to develop the 'cognitive moral capability' of the profession and to mitigate the problem of HRM role duality.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, my first aim was to assess whether prevailing models of ethical expertise can conceptualise moral agency in HRM. I have presented an account of ethical HRM that constitutes an improvement over prevailing accounts.

The orthodox (or mainstream) view regards HRM as a formalised system of functional policies and practices that are predictive, consistent and casual in nature and which aims to achieve organisational goals and employee satisfaction. In addition, HRM sceptics claim that HRM is inherently conflicted and the problems of role duality arise due to a default tendency to support management when considering issues that affect the organisation and its employees.

I have argued that organisations have a positive obligation to employees and in this sense, the goal of HRM is to seek a balancing of interests–though given the often-irreconcilable tensions that exist, complex HRM ethical demands often arise. The mainstream view-with its reliance on functional policies and codes-cannot adequately address complex ethical demands that require ethical judgement and the critical view does not provide an alternative explanation.

I have argued that the difficulties faced by HRM can be overcome if the focus is a positive one: where there is an attempt to balance interests by seeking convergence through the interpretation and application of good policies. An approach that is able to find a way that applies HRM practice ethically whilst mitigating the problem of role duality to ethical HRM, I have therefore argued, is required. If I

am correct, then an important consideration is the HRM practitioner and their expertise because the practitioner is required to respond intelligently to HRM circumstances to be ethical.

Given the limitations of both the orthodox and the critical view, my second aim has been to develop a more satisfactory account. I have proposed a virtue-based practitioner approach that captures the positive intention of contracting strategy and policy, with the flexibility to make ethical judgements. Virtue is a multi-dimensional character trait that is analogous to skill. The professional character of HRM, then, would be characterised by a group of professionals that are motivated to seek to develop their expertise so that they can intelligently respond in a variety of appropriate ways to their circumstances. The application of the moral competencies of prudence, justice, self-control and courage during decision-making, I have claimed, is necessary for good HRM judgement.

I have further proposed that expertise and work in HRM are progressively linked; and have described in a practical way the forms of moral expertise required to respond to situations of increasing ethical complexity, using an ethical HRM framework. The ethical HRM framework describes expertise and work demands-from novice through to expert-identifying important shifts between technical-

and moral-competence requirements for intelligent HRM responses (or good judgement).

I have also argued that any account of ethical HRM should demonstrate how HRM practitioners can take steps to develop ethical HRM expertise. I have suggested that the current focus on abstract knowledge in HRM ethical education is insufficient for the development of practical expertise and that practical learning can be fostered through the critical examination of HRM responses. To accommodate increasing work demands, a continuous professional-development approach is used to create a more practical ethical curriculum for HRM.

The problem with the orthodox account can be overcome using a virtue approach, because it allows for both the positive affirmation of good policy and the flexibility to make ethical judgements. These judgements have been characterised as forms of intelligent responses to complex ethical HRM demands, where a more moderate view regarding ethical convergence is taken. Moreover, the virtue approach provides a plausible account of how expertise and work can be progressively linked, when virtue is considered a skill, and provides a practical way for HRM practitioners to engage with expertise and work demands that the orthodox view does not.

Finally, a virtue account holds that the disposition or professional character of HRM is important. Professional character is the source of a range of intelligent responses to HRM circumstance, which will mitigate issues of role duality. By developing the required moral competence, HRM practitioners will be able to determine the difference between right and wrong as a form of professional judgement and take the required action, if they have the right intention. Moral competencies, such as prudence, justice, self-control and courage (amongst others) provide HRM practitioners with the necessary means to be ethical. Importantly, by critical examination of their responses, the means to be ethical can be developed in a way that is missing from both the orthodox and the critical accounts. If this is correct, then it is possible for HRM practitioners to demonstrate 'ethical competence' and in so doing play a critical leadership role in organisations.

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Table 1: Moral Competencies, Decision Making and HRM

After Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2013) using Rest (1986) decision making model

Virtue Type	Moral Competence	Definition	Traits	Behaviours	Moral Sensitivity (awareness)	Moral Judgement (judgement)	Moral Motivation (intention)	Moral Character (behaviour)	HRM Equivalent
Intellectual	**Prudence** (Originator for other virtues)[1]	Prudence is the ability to consistently make the right decisions through deliberation and reason concerning the moral good of a person, organisation or society within an applicable context.	Deliberating about what to do in context; making each instance a good judgement; and carrying out decisions in action.	• Consider all alternatives; • Assess impact on all agents; • Evaluate against highest ethical & professional standards; • Put in place mechanisms to implement in an effective way.	•Discernment regarding what is suitable for each occasion for what is good; •Discover the 'right means' when two extreme opposites are available.	• The ability to judge the correctness of each specific action as the result of reason and sagacity. • Helps to develop ethical behaviour through the creation of moral intention. • Consistent with ethical judgement	• Shows prudence to will the desired good. • Individual decides to carry out the mandate of prudence through the will, including other virtues.	Influences moral character through the other virtues.	• Judgement,[2] Ethical Decision-making[3] • Objectivity[4]

1 De Vettere, (2002); Mele, (2005) and Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2013)

2 Abbott, 2015

3 Abbott, 2015; SABPP (2013, 2017) and Ulrich et al (2012).

4 SABPP (2017)

						rather than personal values.			
Character (Interpersonal)[5] (Relationability)[6]	**Justice** (Applied Relationships)[7]	It is the permanent attitude of giving to each one what is due	• Do positively the good and avoid evil • Seeks fair acts	* Search for what is appropriate and avoid evil • The willingness to correct own mistakes • The continued attitude of respect for the rights of all people affected • The ability to settle conflicts equitably. • The ability to apply standards and laws properly, taking into account special circumstances, both aggravating and mitigating.	Affects indirectly by helping prudence in the right action	Affects indirectly by helping prudence in the right action	• Directly impacts motivation • The more justice is developed the better the motivation • The more the motivation the more the chance of implementation	•A decision is classified as optimally just when it is made with fortitude, prudence & temperance. An action is just when it fits our reality to the external reality and the true reality of good. To act justly is to act according to reality. And in this sense, justice implies the other virtues, and in so doing guarantees the quality of the unitary act[8]	Fairness[9] Credibility Trust Respect

5 SABPP refer to this as organisation ethics and the importance of engaging stakeholders.

6 Mele (2005)

7 Mele, (2005) and Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2013)

8 Bastons (2008:398)

9 Abbott, 2015; SABPP (2013, 2017) and Ulrich et al (2012).

Character (Intra-personal)[10]	**Self -Control** (moderation or self-control)	It is the ability to control one's own emotions and dominate the passions and instincts.	• Moderation in acts and thoughts. • The willingness to maintain an attitude in accordance with the circumstances and needs for every situation. • The ability to manage one's own emotions and passions	Moderation, decency, continence, gentleness, mercy, modesty, meekness and humility			• Resolution of any motivational conflicts • Reinforces the will, avoiding human tendencies • The greater the development, the greater the intentions will be in line with ethical judgement		Honesty[11] Objectivity
Character (Intra-personal)	**Courage**	• Capacity to implement ethical decisions • Willingness to set difficult and costly goals that are morally beneficial for the organisation and try to get them to face difficulties with determination.	• Seek challenges that are worthwhile • Overcome difficulties • Manage obstacles • Positive attitude • Doing good for others	Magnanimity, magnificence, patience, perseverance				• Moral motivation does not necessarily lead to action, requires additional resources • Figuring out a sequence of concrete actions, working around impediments and resisting distractions	Courage Resilience Service to others

10 SABPP (2014) refers to as personal ethical behaviour

11 SABPP (2017)

Table 2: Ethical HRM Framework

Tenure[12]	Stage[13]	Ethical Name	HRM Level of Work[14]	Description[15]	Example Competencies Performance Management (element – strategy, policy and processes)	
					Technical HRM[16]	Moral[17]
15 Years	5	**Expertise** Mastery of experience & situation	**Executive** Complex Organisations	Leads on agreeing organisational principles – ethics, strategy and leadership culture; Credible and trustworthy role model – shows judgement	Determines the integrational commonalities for performance improvement strategies across highly complex organisations	• The prudence to consider all the possible moral principles, designing creative solutions if required. • The ability to assess the impact of these alternatives on all of the agents affected by the results of the decision taken, whilst respecting the rights of all people affected. • Willingness to set difficult and costly goals that are morally beneficial for the organisation and its stakeholders. • The ability to moderate acts and thoughts in order to develop trust and credibility with senior stakeholders.

12 Derived from the SHRM (2011) HR Competency Library.

13 Dreyfus (2004) model of the development of ethical expertise. .

14 'HRM Level of Work' is a synthesis of SHRM (2012) and the SABPP (2013) competency libraries.

15 Synthesis of possible right actions derived from SHRM (2012) and SABPP (2013) competency libraries.

16 SABPP HRM Technical Competencies (2014)

17 Morales-Sanchez and Cabello-Medina (2015).

10 years	4	**Proficient** Principles	**Senior** Manages a Business Function	Sets organisation standards; engages stakeholders Designs, manages trends, advises on ethical dilemmas	Interprets the performance improvement implications of organisational strategy and sets the vision for performance improvement	• The prudence to consider all possible moral alternatives when setting organisational standards • The continued intention to search for what is morally appropriate for each party involved in a decision. • The continued attitude of respect for the rights of all people affected by his/her behaviour • The ability to manage his/her emotions and passions.
5 years	3	**Competent** Decision Making	**Mid** Practice Management	Interprets, monitors, promotes and remediates; Consistently enforces, trains, audits & monitors policy	Develops performance management policies, processes and systems based on an excellent knowledge of the latest thinking	• The ability to evaluate each alternative in accordance with the highest ethical and professional standards. • The ability to decide wisely and responsibly in accordance with applicable criteria without being carried away by personal biases or preferences. • The disposition to avoid any type of evil result of his/her actions or decisions. • The willingness to correct his/her mistakes as soon as he/she notices them. • The ability to withstand and overcome difficulties. • The willingness to maintain an attitude appropriate to the circumstances and needs for every situation. • The ability to settle conflicts equitably.
2-5 years	2	**Advanced Beginner** Maxims	**Mid** Process Management	Applies, diagnoses problems and challenges others; Uses reasoning to resolve deviations	Manages the implementation of performance management processes and systems	• The disposition to put in place mechanisms to implement decisions in a morally efficient and effective way, involving people in their implementation. • The ability to get rid of obstacles to achieving an objective. • The ability to apply standards and laws properly, taking into account special circumstances, both aggravating and mitigating.
1 Year	1	**Novice** Rules without context	**Early** Individual Contributor	Understands, reports, recognises, reasons and explains	Has basic knowledge and understands the theory behind the organisation's performance management processes and systems, and consults with line managers in terms of application	• The willingness to maintain an attitude in accordance with the circumstances and needs for every situation. • A positive attitude toward challenges. • The willingness to ask for advice and help if needed. • Moderation in acts and thoughts.

Table 3: Reflection based Learning Approach

Using Van Buren and Greenwood's (2013) proposed framework for HRM Education with Mintz' s (2006) virtue-based reflection learning approach

HRM Level[18]	Education Area[19]	Mechanism[20]	Issues[21]	Topics[22]	HRM Content	Pedagogy[23]	Description[24]
Novice (Individual Contributor)	Foundation	Integrated through all education; Ethics awareness programmes[25]	HRM Professional Identity;[26] HRM Responsibilities	Ethical Decision Making; Ethical Leadership HRM moral competence; Ethical HRM framework	HRM Code of Conduct; HR Standards; Corporate Governance; King IV	Directed Discussion[27]	The goal is to give students a chance to gain experience asking and responding to questions and to develop critical thinking skills. Participants learn from formulating their own responses to questions, reacting to the comments of others, and through group interaction and expression of views[28]
Advanced Beginner	Introduction to ethics in HRM	Introductory HRM Course	Ethical HRM Frameworks; Stakeholders; Ethics	Ethical responsibilities owed to stakeholders; Balancing	HR Body of Knowledge	Inquiry based Discussion	Inquiry based discussion builds on directed discussion by challenging participants to identify relevant

18 Ethical HR Framework.

19 Van Buren and Greenwood (2013).

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid

22 Ibid.

23 Mintz (2006)

24 Ibid.

25 SABPP ethics training programme.

26 HRM integrity and virtue

27 Mintz (2006)

28 Ibid

(Process Management)			underpinning specific HRM practices[29]	employee and employer interests			principles and information that help to discover relationships in the situation, which further develop analytical and reasoning skills
Competent (Practice Management)	Ethics within HRM Functional Areas	HRM Courses	Ethical Analysis of specific HRM practices	Ethical Implications of Specific HRM Functions	HR Body of Knowledge	Reflective Discussion	Reflective discussion helps students to "become more cognizant of the learning process and enables them to derive insights from their learning experiences". Participants move from answering questions about their roles and contributions to self-analysis of their participation in discussions.[30]
Proficient (Business Function Management)	Broader Issues within HRM and Ethics	Advanced HRM Programmes	Ethical Analysis of bundles of HRM practices; Ethical implications of strategic HRM and social change	'Conflicted' ethical status of HRM professionals	HR Body of Knowledge	Exploratory Discussion	Exploratory discussion is directed towards assessing whether students can use their critical reasoning skills to arrive at alternative explanations of real-world situations
Expert (Complex Organisations)	Mastery of Experience and Situation[31]	HRM Coaching	Complexity and Ambiguity; Educating Others	Ethical Principles; Role Model; Mentoring	Experience Coaching and Mentoring	Coaching	Coaching is the collaborative relationship formed between coach and student for the purpose of attaining professional or personal development outcomes which are valued by the student[32]

29 Abbot (2015)

30 Ngeow and Kong (2003:44).

31 Ethical HRM Framework

32 Grant et al (2010).